

Development of Hotel Services for Family Travellers to Improve Customer Experience

Case: Original Sokos Hotel Arina, Oulu

Suomela Elizaveta

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Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena oli selvittää Original Sokos Hotel Arinan lisäpalveluiden nykytilanne, asiakaskunta ja hotellin lisäpalvelujen kehittämismahdollisuudet. Tutkimuksen kohderyhmänä toimivat hotellin kotimaiset perhematkailijat, jotka yöpyivät hotellissa lastensa kanssa. Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantaja oli Original Sokos Hotel Arina, Oulu.

Tavoitteen saavuttamiseksi käytettiin sekä kvantitatiivista että kvalitatiivisia tutkimusmenetelmiä. Opinnäytetyöhön sisältyi kvantitatiivinen tutkimusmenetelmä, kysely ja tuotetestaus. Kaikki asiakaspalautteet kerättiin hiihtolomaviikkojen (9–10) aikana. Onnistuneen asiakaskokemuksen luomisen ja hotellipalveluiden kehittämisen ymmärtämiseksi käytettiin monia lähteitä, kuten akateemisia lehtiartikkeleita, kirjoja ja tilastotietoja. Lastentapahtuma Onni Oravan Puuhakoulu järjestettiin kahdesti: 28. helmikuuta ja 6. maaliskuuta. Tapahtuma ei osoittautunut hyödylliseksi asiakaskokemuksen kannalta.

Opinnäytetyö keskittyi asiakaskokemukseen ja hotellipalvelujen laatuun vaikuttaviin tekijöihin perhematkailijoiden näkökulmasta. Nykyisiä hotellipalveluita analysoimalla selvisi, että lasten leikkipaikat ja hotellin yleiset tilat tarvitsevat muutoksia. Lisäksi lapsille suunnattujen palveluiden markkinointia tulisi parantaa. Joka tapauksessa tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että kaiken kaikkiaan hotelliasiakkaat olivat tyytyväisiä asiakaskokemukseen ja hotellin asiakaspalveluun. Tulevia hotellihuoneiden muutoksia pidetään ajankohtaisina. Lisäksi hotellin tulisi laajentaa yhteistyötään muiden yritysten kanssa tarjotakseen monipuolisia aktiviteetteja asiakkaille.

Avainsanat asiakaskokemuksen kehittäminen, tuotetestaus, hotellin lisäpalvelut, perhematkailijat, asiakaspalvelu

School of Tourism and Hospitality Management
Degree Programme in Tourism
Bachelor of Hospitality Management

Author	Elizaveta Suomela	Year	2020
Supervisors	Ulla Kangasniemi, Petra Paloniemi		
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The objective of thesis was to find out the current situation of additional hotel services, who are the hotel customers and how the hotel services should be developed in order to improve the customer experience in the hotel. In addition, thesis provides information on the factors affecting customer experience and quality of the hotel services from the perspective of family travelers. The target group of the study was the family customers with children staying at the hotel. Commissioner for thesis was Original Sokos Hotel Arina, Oulu.

To achieve this aim qualitative research was used, conducting a paper survey and product testing. The mix-method approach was used in this thesis. All data was collected during ski holiday weeks (9–10). To gain a good understanding of factors creating a successful customer experience and developing hotel services, many previous theoretical sources were used such as academic journal articles, books and statistical data. Product testing Onni Oravan Puuhakoulu was organized and carried out twice 28th of February and 6th of March. Product testing did not prove to be beneficial in terms of customer experience.

Present hotel services were analyzed, which revealed that marketing children services should be improved, as well as children playgrounds and the hotel public areas would need changes. However, the research results proved that in overall hotel customers are satisfied with customer experience and customer services at the hotel. The planned changes of hotel rooms are considered topical. In addition, the hotel should expand its cooperation with other companies in order to offer diverse range of activities to customers.

Key words customer experience development, product testing, hotel additional services, family travellers, customer experience

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1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine how the Original Sokos Hotel Arina additional services could be developed to improve the customer experience of the hotel customers. In this thesis was used qualitative research method and mix-method approach. The target group of the study is the family customers with children staying at the hotel. The study was conducted during the ski holiday weeks (9–10). The objective of thesis is also to find out the current situation of additional hotel services, such as their utilization rate, whether all hotel customers are aware of the services, whether there is something to be improved and whether the additional services provide enough value for the hotel.

The main question of the thesis is how to develop hotels services for family travelers to improve customer experience in Oulu. However, the most important research questions for the thesis are the following: What kind of families stay at the hotel. Which hotel services are most important to the family travellers and how can be hotel services improved? What is current customer experience at the hotel from the perspective of family travellers and how could it be improved?

First in thesis is introduced the main topic of the research, research aims, the commissioner and background. After this starts theory, which consists of customer experience and target group behaviour, segmentation, product development and product testing. Next in the thesis are research results including research methods, data collection with results and analyses, event product testing and development suggestions for the hotel to be able to improve customer experience. In the end of the thesis can be found conclusion, bibliography and appendices.

2 COMMISSIONER BACKGROUND

2.1 Commissioner: Original Sokos Hotel Arina, Oulu

The commissioner for this thesis is Original Sokos Hotel Arina, Oulu and its Sales manager Tiina Itkonen. Original Sokos Hotel Arina is part of the big change Osuuskauppa Arina. Osuuskauppa Arina also belongs under biggest Finnish network of companies operating in the retail and service sectors.

Original Sokos Hotel Arina is located in the city center of Oulu. The location of the hotel is one of the most important venues as it is in the same building as the Valkea shopping centre. All the sightseen of downtown Oulu are within easy reach and a wide range of services are available to all customer groups. The company is interested in the environment and its care, as the hotel is a responsible green key certificate holder. (Google Maps 2020; Itkonen 2020.)

To increase the comfort of the hotel rooms, the hotel will be renovated in the autumn of 2020. With the upcoming room refurbishment, every hotel room will have its own story. The upcoming reform will include three main themes, such as the lingering heat of summer night, the rise of free salmon and the aroma of tar. (Sokos Hotels 2020a.)

The commissioner is part of the Sokos Hotels chain which is one of the biggest and known hotel chains. It includes more than 50 hotels in Finland, Tallinn and Saint-Petersburg. Sokos hotel chain separates own hotels in three main concept groups named Break, Solo and Original. Break Hotels are holiday hotels, which offer active products as spa and swimming pool services. Solo hotels are focused more on the history and storytelling in which community and locals play an important part. While Original hotels focus on providing versatile and easily accessible products and services. Original hotels understand customers' needs and offers different additional services, which makes them the best choice for family travelers from a conceptual perspective. (Sokos Hotels 2020b.)

Oulu has two Sokos hotels, one of them is Break Sokos Hotel Eden and other is my commissioner Original Sokos Hotel Arina (Sokos Hotels 2020c). However, Original Hotels understand the needs of the customers and offer a wide range of services, so the hotel is a good option for families with children. In addition, the location of the Original Sokos Hotel Arina makes it best option for city travelers, because many of the city happenings such as Christmas market and children events take place in the shopping center Valkea. (Google Maps 2020.)

Sokos Hotels has many different partners, which can be seen in variable package services. Usually, these package services include accommodation and other activity services like restaurant meals, theatre performance, festival tickets, spa and swimming pool services and other activity tickets like Hop Lop and Super Park. Original Sokos Hotel Arina offers its customers a cheaper price for tickets to Eden spa and swimming pool, Tietomaa, Hop Lop, Talvikylä and Vauhtipuisto. (Vauhtipuisto 2020.)

Original Sokos Hotel Arina offers many services in addition to accommodation. Some of hotel services are free of charge and belongs to overnight customers. This kind of services are breakfast, hotel facilities such as a children's playroom, book corners, sauna and gym services. Hotel also have free services for children as Onni Orava breakfast, Onni Orava environment passport and city spotting and Terva Tonttu Toivo. Hotel can also borrow children's equipment such as sled, slider, bicycle and even scotch for families. Some of hotel additional services are chargeable, like pet accommodation, children's extra beds and extra rooms. The hotel staff have many tips and ideas for activity during your stay. The hotel cooperates extensively with other partners, so there are service packages for customers. Some of the services offer reduced prices for hotel guests. (Itkonen 2020.)

Sokos Hotels have their mascot for children which is called Onni Orava. Hotels use this mascot as a theme for children playgrounds, book corners, children events at the hotel, children breakfasts and in the hotel restaurants. Children have been taken into consideration while staying at the hotel. At the arrival children receive some surprise gift from the reception. In addition, the hotel has all necessary baby and children equipment such as a potty, cot and self-portrait.

Children can borrow books and toys from the hotel to their room (Sokos Hotels 2020d; Itkonen 2020.)

The hotel has two different children playgrounds: one in the breakfast room and another on the second floor. Both playgrounds have limited space. Anyway, both playgrounds have games and activities for children to play. Actual hotel playground is located on the hotels second floor. There are various activities for each age of children such as blackboard, climbing wall, children books, jumping ball, table and seat, Legos, board games and other toys. Also, there are TV with different virtual games and activities for children (Itkonen 2020.)

The breakfast room playground is smaller than actual playground, but it includes some toys and activities for small children. At the breakfast room are for use highchairs and lemonade point for children. Hotels children book corner is located at first floor. Book corner includes TV with games and activities and different variables of children books. All of books can be borrowed to the hotel rooms during stay (Itkonen 2020.)

3 FAMILY TRAVELER EXPERIENCES AND BEHAVIOUR

3.1 Customer Experience and Measurement

According to Statistics Finland last year's domestic travelling in Finland was getting more popular (Tilastokeskus 2020a). Tourists have seen and experienced many different services and accommodations. Selection of hotel services and accommodation in Finland are quite versatile. Customer have options from rent apartments, hostels, Airbnb, cottages to high quality hotels and known hotel chains. Since providing just accommodation service is not any more enough, almost all the hotels have additional services as restaurants and cafes, sauna, meeting rooms, gym, spa and swimming pools, playground for children. In addition, this year, corona has brought an additional challenge to tourism, which has significantly reduced the demand for hotels. This can be seen in Figure 1. (Tilastokeskus 2020b).

As before mentioned, support and additional services are important part in creating a positive customer experience. Hotel customer service, accommodation and additional services together creates whole customer experience for the customer. Pre- onsite and post experiences are parts of the customer experience that should be in balance in order to create positive experience. Additional services as free events or happenings can bring extra value for the hotel customers. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 59–62.)

The creation of the customer experience is an ongoing process, which allows the customer experience to be formed even before the actual start of the customer relationship, at different stages of the customer relationship and throughout the customer relationship. Three stages can be identified in the creation of the customer experience: pre-experience, core experience and post-experience (Tuulaniemi 2011, 38.) The creation of a customer experience begins when the customer feels that they need a certain service or product and start looking for information about it. According to Meyer & Schwager (2007, 118–119) identifying the need and there for the creation of the customer experience can also start the creation of the customer experience, from the indirect contact with the company.

Based on previous experience or partial encounters with the company, the customer often has some opinion about the company (Filenius 2015, 24–45). The core experience takes place between pre- and post-experience. The value of the actual product or service is the core experience, as it serves as the reason why the customer acquires the service or product (Tuulaniemi 2011, 38–39). According to Löytänä & Korteso (2011, 72) post-experience is an opportunity to improve the value experienced by the customer and therefor gain additional income for the company, as post-experiences take place after the actual trade or service.

The customer experience is affected by many factors at the stage of experience creation. At the heart of the elements of building the customer experience are the different dimensions of customer experience, of which there are six according to Gentile, Spiller, and Noci (2007). These dimensions include the social and sensory component, the emotional component, the cognitive component, the pragmatic component, the lifestyle component, and the relative component.

The creation of the customer experience is influenced by the same elements and clues that act as factors in the formation of the customer experience. These factors are not entirely within the control of the company, as there are also elements that are affected by, for example, weather conditions or other customers. The absence of some elements may also affect the way the customer experience is formed. (Verhoef, Neslin & Vroomen 2007; Berry & Carbone 2007, 32–34.)

The customer experience is an abstract concept and there are several different definitions for it. The following definition can be considered as one of the definitions. The customer experience that a customer creates with a company is the sum of encounters, images and emotions. The customer experience is also influenced by emotions and subconscious interpretations because the customer experience is not a conscious decision but an experience. As a result, it is not up to the customer to decide what the customer experience is. Instead, hotels can choose what kind of experience they want to create for their customers. The customer experience can be more than just the sales itself or the dialogue at the hotel reception. The customer's prior and subsequent observations also affect

the customer experience. An example of this is the company website and how informative they are. The location of the hotel is also of great importance to the customers when choosing a hotel. The customer is more satisfied when the necessary services are close by (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 11–12.)

Product sales are usually required during intangible experiences. Families with children are used to waiting for it. Consumers also expect even more creative combinations of services and products. Consumer rarely get experiences of buying the product itself that is why selling physical product also requires adventures support. For example, fairs offer competitions and lectures in the shopping centres, customers are increasingly entertained by popular performers. Customer involvement in the production or development of a product or service on a service provider's website represents a new form of hybrid consumption (Wilska 2011.)

Some measures can be used to measure customer experience. Customer feedback can be divided into two groups: passive and active. From a company perspective passive feedback comes from customer's own initiative, directly without any inquiry, in the way and place the customer wants, at the time they want. Passive feedback also includes feedback forms and boxes. Active feedback instead, focuses on asking customers for feedback in different situations. The feedback received should be collected and verified to identify relevant issues that can be utilized in customer experience management and customer service. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 187–190.)

In this case activity means the activity and initiative of the company or service provider. From the customer's point of view, activity and passivity go the other way from the perspective of the customer, spontaneous feedback from customer is active activity and passive feedback is automated feedback surveys. Following points should be considered when evaluating the customer experience with spontaneous feedback. First, spontaneous feedback can come from high-profile customer or casual commentator, which proves that not every feedback may be as important. Second, there is more negative and really positive feedback than moderate feedback. Third, the feedback received should be collected and verified to identify relevant issues that can be utilized in customer experience

management and customer service (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 187–190.) These issues are for example holistic picture of the analyses. In this way, can be taken in to account the views of customers of different profiles and to consider, which opinions are the most important issues that cause conflicting views. While measuring, Zolkiewski et al. (2017) noted that gaining understanding is more important than measuring and it should be considered. According to them, measuring the customer experience is not relevant unless it increases the opportunity to better understand the journey experienced by the customer and directs operations in a more co-evolving direction.

Regular and often annual customer satisfaction surveys are the most familiar ways to measure customer experience and satisfaction. Measuring customer satisfaction with one broader survey is often challenging. The survey easily becomes too long, leaving the respondent unable to focus on the questions at the end. The survey is always a thing of the past, and there is little possible dialogue to correct the customer experience. It is likely that things have already begun to be forgotten, as there may already be time for the situation being assessed and it is no longer possible to reflect on emotions. Because the survey is comprehensive, its analysis can only be left to summarize. In this case, the query cannot be fully utilized. In any case, a good customer experience leaves a mark. In other words, a strong (negative or positive) customer experience is remembered, making distance from the event beneficial. If the customer does not remember the service provider or service event, the customer experience can also generally be considered a failure. (Löytänä& Korteso 2011, 48, 193–194.)

Especially in Finland, the customer experience is often understood only as the development of customer service. Customer service and sales departments are most often associated with individual customers of the company's operations, but it must be understood that other functions of the company enable the sales and customer service departments to function effectively, and thereby bring positive experiences to customers. Customer service is therefore only one function as part of the overall picture (Cahill 2016.)

3.2 Customer Decision Making Process

When arriving at the hotel customers usually have some assumptions created through marketing, familiar brands, past experiences or testimonials. Price of the hotel room defines and creates customer understanding of what level of quality they should expect. Past experiences in different hotels create the strongest expectations and because of these high standards are settled in hotel to meet and or even exceed these expectations. In order to satisfy customers, the hotel must meet or even exceed the promises set by the marketing department. Keeping promises at a low level to make it easier to exceed customer expectations may be not the best idea. With this company, may not reach many of its potential customers, and the hotel image will stay insignificant. The main point to satisfy a customer is always meet and exceed customer expectations. (Ford, Sturman & Heaton 2012, 17.)

Customer expectations to the service are directly affected by the promises that has been made in the ads. The ads create images that the customer waits to come true. Also, news reported by the media, whether bad or good, affects expectations (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 95.) The customer expectations can also be exceeded, making the experience memorable. Expectations can be exceeded in several different ways, of which I will now mention a few. Experience that exceeds expectations can be personal, with the customer service representative treating the customer as a person, and not just as part of a customer base or a specific target group. Another person's expectations exceed a customized service. For example, a customer may be positively surprised if asked if they want the same room as on their last visit. Surprise is perhaps one of the biggest things that exceeds customer expectations. A small gift to be distributed at the hotel reception may be of little value but will make the customer positively surprised. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 64–68.)

An important part of producing a customer experience is the customer experience that exceeds expectations, which enables us to create a competitive advantage for the company. This customer experience can be divided into three different parts, core experience, extended experience and experience that exceeds expectations (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 59–60.) The customer experience

begins with a core experience, the purpose of which is to carry out a basic task from the company's point of view. From the customer's perspective, the core experience is the benefit or achievable value that makes the customer buy the product or service. The company should be able to implement the core experience in all circumstances, which is important from a customer experience management perspective. In order to meet customer expectations, the number of services and functions included in the core experience must be considered sensibly (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 59–62.)

An extended experience can be built around a successful core experience by adding a service or product to the core experience that increases the value generated for the customer. Promoting and enabling are elements of an expanded experience that add value. Promotion refers to the ways in which a company expands the customer experience beyond the core experience. One example of this is airlines, which offer their customers the opportunity to watch movies in addition to the core experience (travel). Enabling refers to ways to temporarily expand a core experience. For example, when heart rate data from sports performance is used in addition to physical measurement in software and on a social network. According to Löytänen and Korteso (2011), these elements are personality, enabling individuality, timeliness, divisibility, sustainability, dignity before and after the trade, surprise and emotion appeal. A good customer experience is influenced by the ability of companies to add the above elements. (Löytänä & Korteso 2011, 62–63.)

However, exceeding customer expectations is not always the most important thing in developing a customer experience or improving customer loyalty. Producing experiences that exceed expectations in every encounter can be challenging, even if they are a good way for the company to compete. The ease of experience experienced by customers must also be considered in the development of the customer experience. The role of ease is more influential than exceeding expectations in customer service encounters. So, companies should focus more strongly on making service as effortless as possible for customers in customer service encounters. These activities can be used for the removal of obstacles and difficulties, emotional side of attention in India situations of interaction with customers, minimizing handovers, disillusioned customer

feedback exploitation, as well as customer service personnel accreditation to enable hassle-free experience possible for customers. Both roles of experience are not mutually exclusive, and companies should not focus on just one of them. It is more important to understand the purpose and impact of different encounters on the customer experience. (Dixon, Freeman & Toman 2010, 116–122.)

3.3 Creating Customer Value

Central to the production of the customer experience is the value to be produced for the customer. Value creation, like the customer experience, is a subjective event, the company cannot determine what kind of value they create for the customer through its own activities, but the company only creates the conditions for the customer experience and the value experienced by the customer. (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 18.) Kuusela and Rintamäki (2002, 132–133) see the value created for the customer based on the transaction experience, which involves sacrifices and benefits. Benefits are hierarchically constructed from concrete and measurable benefits to abstract and subjectively evaluable benefits. The utilitarian factors of the transaction experience related to the good or service are often the reason for the transaction, but a comprehensive transaction experience also requires so-called the concretization of hedonistic benefits during transactions. These levels of benefits and sacrifices are goods and services, activities, knowledge and skill, and feeling and will.

The lowest level of goods and services are often a prerequisite for a customer's transaction and a rational reason for the transaction. At this level, the benefits are seen as financial savings and quality improvements, and correspondingly, sacrifices are economically measurable. From a company perspective, the competitive advantage achieved at this level is mainly based on price, which makes it easy to copy. At the next level, value creation is based on action, that is, what the customer must do to obtain a product or service. Value can also be seen built when a customer uses a product or service. The benefits and sacrifices at this level are related to the customer's waste of time and effort, as well as reliability and dependability. At the next level of knowledge and skill, the weighting of value becomes more hedonistic and abstract, as well as more difficult to measure. The customer may no longer know everything they are experiencing,

and the role of symbolism is growing. (Kuusela & Rintamäki 2002, 132–137; Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 17–20.)

Symbolic values relate to the expression of the customer's personality and the benefits experienced from it, such as a sense of belonging to other users of the product or service. Sacrifices, on the other hand, take place through cognitive and social sacrifices. At the highest level, the experience is based on emotional values and is also very difficult to perceive. However, the company must enable the formation of emotional value by providing a framework for it and minimizing the sacrifices required. In terms of achieving a competitive advantage, emotional values are good because they are unique and thus very challenging to copy. (Kuusela & Rintamäki 2002, 132–137; Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 17–20.)

3.4 Customer Journey and Satisfaction

It is important to understand the customer's customer path and the points of contact at its various stages, as the customer's experience consists of all encounters with the company. In the past, the number of contact points has been much smaller, which has made it easier and more manageable for companies to define the customer path. The ability of companies to manage all points of contact has become more challenging, due to the impact of digital commerce and social media. (Löytänä & Korkiakoski 2014, 98.) Today, customer experiences are more social in nature and customers communicate with companies through a number of different channels countless times, which makes customer paths even more complex. The customer path is a dynamic process that modifies the customer experience. The customer experience is considered to have begun from the pre-purchase phase, which ends with post-purchase contact with the company. Previous experience with the company as well as external factors is part of that process. Only some of the contact points are manageable by the company. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 69.)

One of the stages of the customer experience is the pre-purchase starting situation, which includes the customer's pre-expectations for the company or service. The customer often expects something to do with the company, as less

often the company is completely new to the customer. (Filenius 2015, 24–45.) On the other hand, these expectations are often due to past experience with the company, marketing communications, or external points of contact, in which case the baseline situation is mixed with other stages identified by Lemon and Verhoef (2016, 69).

According to Filenius (2015) the pre-purchase phase includes all customer interaction with the brand, category, or environment prior to the purchase situation. In marketing, this phase is accompanied by needs identification, exploration and consideration. From a customer experience perspective, this includes all customer experiences prior to purchase. In practice, we can limit this phase to experience from the identification of the need or the impulse to the consideration of a product or service that meets the needs. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 75–76.) Of course, it is also not possible to ignore the customer's previous experiences with companies, as the customer experience is an ongoing process. The second step, purchasing, involves the customer's experiences with the company and its environment in a situation related to the acquisition of a product or service. Functions related to this step include, for example, selection, ordering and payment. Although the purchase transaction is often the shortest of the three phases, new channels and an increased amount of information have shaped the purchase phase. Due to the multiplicity of channels and information, the customer may experience an influx of information or an abundance of options, as a result of which he may interrupt the purchase or postpone the purchase. (Filenius 2015, 24–45; Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 75–76.)

The post-purchase phase theoretically covers all of the customer's post-purchase business-related experiences for the rest of the customer's life. In practice, this step can be limited to cover experiences that are genuinely related to the brand or product after purchase. Such activities include, for example, the use of a service or product, post-purchase commitment, and service requests. The product or service also becomes a critical point of contact in the post-purchase phase of the customer path. (Lemon & Verhoef 2016, 76.)

3.5 Segmentation and Family Travellers

As a process segmentation means identifying guests into different homogeneous groups that have the same needs and interests (Lynn 2011). The main benefits of segmentation for companies is to identify the needs and preferences of the current and target customers. With this company can more effectively adapt their products to meet these preferences and therefor been better than competitors. Due to effective segmentation companies can identify the market segments that are most profitable and focus their services on them specifically. Companies can discover profitable, untouched, niche markets with effective segmentation. Company can choose the target segment and do the segmentation of customers with a three-stage process: first, divide the market according to similar needs in different segments, second company chooses segments which are most suitable for it, and finally the services and products are changed to meet the needs of the segments chosen. Market segmentation main idea is that companies cannot fulfil all the requirements of all people, therefor the best way to achieve a competitive advantage is to fulfil the needs of specific target markets and focus the company business strategy on them. (Morritt 2009, 4–8.)

Sokos Hotel Arina Oulu target group is consisting of S-group customers which are mostly business travelers, family travelers, couples and other individuals belonging in loyalty program. Based on the wishes of the commissioner, target group for the thesis was chosen as family segment.

There are different constructs of families which is important to understand. Each brand or hotel may have their own viewpoint for the construct of a family. Traditional views of a family are changing, and it is important to understand. According to Merriam-Webster (2020) family can be defined as “the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children, or any of various social units different from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family”. (Merriam-Webster 2020a.)

Anyway, in the hospitality industry definition of family customer base has developed and changed from this traditional construct of a family. Rainer Jenss, founder of Family Travel Association and its president said that only about 25-

30% of families represents traditional families which consist of mom, dad and children (Poder 2015.) Family can consist of other adults than parents or children other than their own. Therefore different constructs of families should be recognized when segmenting potential customers. (Wilska 2011.)

Most important characteristics of family travellers are value consciousness, making memories, health and safety, fun for the entire family and staycations. Families to add value to their reservation by searching deals like free breakfast or 50% off from second room. With creating memories families are more interested in health and wellness on vacations. The study proves that families are expecting activities and fun for both adults and children. Less travel expenses for families can offer staycations. Time at the destination can be increased and amount of travel can be decreased, by staying close to home (Hotels.com 2013.)

According to Wiska (2011) Finnish respondents agreed the need for affordable and well-priced vacations. Study shows that domestic travelers are looking for friendly and reliable staff, safety, calm and clean environment. Family time is rated after and memory making, and experiential activities are not important for domestic travelers. Parents appreciate and prefer practical services for children as playrooms and T.V areas. There are some conflicts in the results of studies but family time, discounted prices and activities for children were preferences of family travelers (Wilska 2011.)

Finns as a customer are challenging, because they do not usually provide direct positive or negative feedback, which makes it difficult for a service provider to be certain of customer dissatisfaction or satisfaction. Finnish customers usually think in their mind that they will not use service anymore if they have got bad service. In order to prevent bad service and address potential grievances companies should encourage their customers to provide feedback. If this would be done the company will have the opportunity to manage a good reputation. Customer experience should surprise customer positively, in a way that customer cannot expect. Customers usually want to share positive experiences with their relatives and friends. (Lahtinen & Isoviita 2001, 42.)

According to Statistics Finland overnight stays by domestic tourists in Finnish accommodation establishments decreased by 44.3% due to the coronavirus

market situation. In addition, overnight stays by foreign tourists decreased by 53.0% from the previous year. In total, there were 0.99 million overnight stays, which was 46.9% less than a year earlier. Almost half (40%) of hotels reported closing early, so hotels were open for an average of 24 days in March 2020. These figures are preliminary and have been collected from accommodation establishments with at least 20 beds or caravan pitches with an electric plug. (Tilastokeskus 2020b.)

According to Statistics Finland the average family consists of 2.8 people (Tilastokeskus 2018).

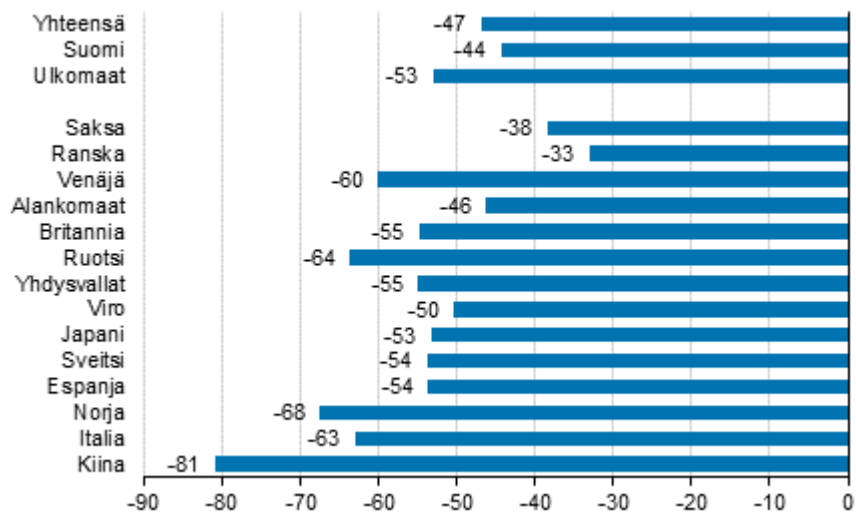


Figure 1 Change in overnight stays in March 2020/2019 (Tilastokeskus 2020)

4 HOTEL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Hotel Product Development Process

According to Bowen, Kotler & Makens (2014) product can be defined as everything that can be offered, bought, consumed or considered in the market. A product can be called a good or service, but it can also be called an experience, an idea or information (Raatikainen 2008, 64). The product is intended to satisfy the consumer's desire. The customer communicates their needs in a way called a desire. Examples of needs are physical needs such as hunger or social needs such as community. (Bowen et al. 2014, 12, 251.)

Productization can be called "packaging" the services or products produced for the customer and defining, specifying and profiling them (Villanen, 2016, 21). Productization can be used in development of new service idea or improvement of quality of existing services. Productization aim can differ from each other. The goal of productization is to get best revenue as possible from the appealing character, logo or brand in the form of different products and services. (Wilska, 2011.) While Jaakola et al. (2009) said that productization aim is to improve company's competitiveness through organization, standardization and concretization of service definition. New service idea should be critically evaluated before starting major development work. Additional strategic fit, market, segment, profitability and development requirements must be analysed. (Jaakkola et al. 2009, 5, 9.)

As a concept productization does not have one exact definition. Productization consists of defining, describing, improving, producing and continuously developing the offering so that customer benefits are maximized, and the service or product is easier to sell (Simula & Lehtimäki & Salo 2008, 5.) The commercialization of a service is aimed at solving a customer's problem or satisfying a need, rather than producing a specific product. The value generated to the customer benefits the customer and is often intangible. When commercializing services, the product consists of a clearly standardized and reasonably priced operation that utilizes intangible knowledge and performance that meets the customer's needs and motivation to purchase. From customer

perspective, a service product should stand out from its competitors. Service product should be a unique and meet customer expectations and needs. A service is well produced when it has a clear target group and market, sells and produces margins to the service provider and is reproducible. (Toner 2013, 14–16.)

According to the service package model, collection of different services in total complete product and can be called as service product. Service package consists of core service, additional and support services. The reason why company is present on the market can be called core service. In the hotel world this is arranging accommodation. Additional services help and allow the use of a core product, in the hotel this is service arranged by the reception. Support services, complement and bring value to the core and ancillary services. As example, in hotel restaurant and concierge services, or a physical product such as a mini bar are included in support services. (Grönroos 2015, 206–208.)

4.2 Tourism Product and Service Development

A company or service provider business idea is defined by the core products that generate most of the company's livelihood. The customers core benefit in hotel operations is meeting the need for sleep. A service product is created by considering all tangible and intangible factors that provide added value to the core benefit received by the customer. The added value can be experienced in technical features such as pillow softness or hotel room temperature, as well as ancillary services such as hotel reception services. Companies focus to differentiate themselves from their competitors by offering a variety of support services designed to increase customer comfort and enjoyment of service use. Support services at accommodation may include, for example, laundry services and chain or hotel-specific loyalty benefits. By offering various program services, the attractiveness of accommodation services can be increased (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 13.)

There are several reasons for product development. An increase in sales, which usually requires new or renewed products in addition to marketing communications, can be one of them. Product development can also be caused

by changes in the market and competition. The company must be able to stand out from its competitors and meet demand as new demand and new competitors enter the market. In addition, when planning supply, it must be considered that customers' consumption habits tend to change (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 94.)

The service providers product development process consists of design and implementation steps. In the planning phase, the business idea of the service provider is re-evaluated and developed, after which a new product development strategy is created. Customers and our own personnel are used to help evaluate development ideas and develop the service concept. In addition, an economic analysis is performed to test the productivity of the product. The new service product is being tested and further developed during the implementation phase. As a product becomes commercialized, the aftermath of the product is monitored in order to provide the company with useful information about the development process (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 98.)

The entire service process needs to be developed, rather than product development. It is important that in the design and development of the service, all parts of the product are linked together so that the customer can easily perceive the overall picture of them. Blueprinting is a method used to develop a service process. Blueprinting creates a diagram of all the parts of a product, showing all the points of contact where the customer is in contact with the company. The same formula contains all the invisible and visible steps required for product formation (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 103.)

An economic analysis must be made of renewed and new products, as a functioning tourism product is long-term and economically viable. The costs of product development must be considered in pricing. When analysing the economic aspect, one has to consider the size of the group and its profitability and the time spent on preparation and post-production (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 110.) Product testing has two purposes. The purpose is to develop the product and market the product, as the test team consists of potential customers. When testing a product, it is important for the company that the product is tested in a situation that corresponds as closely as possible to the actual use situation

and that the testers correspond to the actual users of the product (Komppula & Boxberg 2002, 112–114.)

4.3 Service Design

Service design is determined by the design and development of service products using design-based methods. Service design refers to a service experience that is designed in a user-oriented way to meet the customer's needs and the company's business goals. Service design has two important goals, such as satisfying customers' needs. From the perspective of research and expertise, service design is still quite new. There is no exact definition or well-established terminology on the subject yet. Different terms are used for many of the same things in English and Finnish, as there are several translations (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 10; Service Design Terminology 2020.)

Product development is different from traditional service design. The technical features of a product, such as content, functionality or saleability, are part of the areas in which product development focuses. While in service design, service experience is considered important, such as how the customer wants to buy the product and how the purchase and user experience is developed to make the experience as pleasant as possible (RL-Ideointi 2010.) According to Polaine et al. (2013) services consist of interaction situations and different contact points such as spaces, objects, people and processes. It is important to define the route the customer travels through the contact points in order to properly format the service. Perceiving and designing a customer journey is easier when the journey is described visually (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 31; Polaine et al. 2013, 41.)

The stages of the service design process are divided into six different stages according to their purpose, which are understanding, thinking, developing, filtering, explaining and implementing. Together, these steps form the framework according to which the service design process proceeds (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 32.) Numerous development opportunities can be found in service design with its various tools so-called creative tourism, where the customer is strongly involved in building a service product (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 36).

Understanding is the basis of the design process, as this section explores the problems and needs of existing as well as potential customers, through dialogue (Nisula 2020). This creates an idea of the goals the company should head towards. The company must consider various factors that affect its operations, such as the work environment, legal, cultural and competitive factors. The company's resources and opportunities to benefit from other actors should also be considered. One tool in the understanding phase can be, for example, trend analysis, which provides information on possible current and future trends that may affect customer behaviour. Another tool can be the so-called critical point technique, where the purpose is to go through the critical points encountered by the customer where the service provider is at risk of failure. (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 32–33.)

The delineation of the direction and scope of the service design project is done in the thinking phase. The purpose of the thinking phase is to define the visions of the project and set precise goals for it. At this stage, for example, encounter point analysis can be used as a tool, where special attention is paid to those encounters that create a service experience for customers. (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 33–34.)

The introduction of new ideas and solutions is included in the development phase. The information gained through the understanding and thinking stages is utilized in refining the details related to the service experience. One of the tools of the development phase can be considered the discussion of the features of the service product, in a group of people involved in the project in different ways. This provides a variety of valuable perspectives for product development. An example of a developing discussion when designing a hotel product could be representatives of the parties selling the product, the person responsible for pricing and a potential customer (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 34; The Design Council 2013.)

Ideas created during the development phase are to be tested in the filtering phase. The goal of testing is to select the most feasible ideas from a variety of ideas. Even at this stage, a discussion can be used as a tool to explore the product from different perspectives step by step. In addition, different action

models can be utilized by introducing action models based on imaginary characters created based on the basic types of service users. Fictional characters make it possible to understand users more individually (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 34–35.)

Visualization of ideas helps to perceive and test the service experience, so the service processes and different service situations should be described in as much detail as possible. Usually the visualization of ideas is done at the explanatory stage. One way to do this is to test the product in real life to see if it is possible to detect problem areas and product trump cards. (Service Design Terminology 2020;Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 35.)

Service products and their processes are developed and refined during the implementation phase. In the development of service products and their processes, a “blueprint” process diagram can be used to describe the progress of the service and the details it contains (Moritz 2005, 145). The purpose of a blueprint is to explain in a visual way how the parts of the service relate to each other, as the process diagram is usually divided into visible and invisible parts to the customer. In addition, role scripts can be created as a tool to show different customer service situations and help staff understand their role (Liekkinen & Wiik 2009, 36.)

4.4 Event Organization and Management in Hotel

For a long time now, events have played an important social role in making life happier. Many events have a long and widespread history such as weddings, funerals and birthdays. Nowadays, the original purpose and nature of many events have changed, bringing modern and commercial goals to the forefront. Examples include Midsummer, Harvest Festival, Christmas and Easter. An event is an opportunity that is different from your daily routine. The event is related to leisure, culture, personal or community needs and goals that are designed to educate, celebrate, entertain or challenge the people or group involved (Shone & Barry, 2013, 6–7.)

According to Getz (2005) content of the event defines it best. He explains the event from the perspective of both the event organizer and the guest. The event

is a one-time, irregularly organized event which is different from the daily program or activities of the event organizer. For the guest, the event is an opportunity to experience something different in everyday life or something that is normally not achievable. Events can be diverse, and they provide different experiences for their participants. (Getz 2005, 16.) While Goldblatt (2011) focuses on specifying the celebrating side of the events by saying: “The event recognizes a unique moment in time through ceremonies and rituals and to meet special needs” (Getz 2005, 16).

According to Shone and Barry (2013) events can be separated into four main categories leisure events, cultural events, community events, and private events. In practice, event can usually fit into more than one category, which makes the division unambiguous and indeed. When defining and analysing the goals, organizers, or origins of an event, it is important to understand the importance of duplication. (Shone & Barry 2013, 7.)

Usually event planning is started from the implementation plan. The program frame, the place and time of the event have been determined first. However, event planning should always start with setting a goal. The goal must be clearly defined and easy measurable. Goals need to be able to track project progress and analyse how successful the event has been (Shone & Barry 2013, 243.)

4.5 Product testing: Onni Orava Puuhakoulu Events

Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event was created for this thesis. The purpose of the event was to positively impact the customer experience of families with children at the hotel, creating memories shared among the whole family. It is also intended to increase the awareness of family customers about the hotel’s services and product for children. This event also serves as a “product” test, which should indicate whether there is a need for similar events in the Hotel in the future and whether they will produce the desired outcome. This desired outcome is to create added value for the customer group and to enable the research of the thesis.

The Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event was organized twice: on 28 February and 6 March 2020. This can be seen in appendix 2. The event was decided to be at the hotel’s playroom. Recommended age for the participants was from three till eight-

year-old children and their parents. Maximum number of children was decided to be 8, because hotels playground area was limited. Event was held by three assistant me as the event organizer, photographer and mascot Onni Orava. Event programme consisted four different workshops construction, exercise area, art field and teaching area. Each workshop had own points and tasks to be performed. The task of the construction workshop was to learn how to build a house from Legos using imagination. Also, modelling wax could be used in this workshop. The propose of exercise area was to make children active and move more with practicing wall climbing or performing various exercises tasks. Art field tasks included drawing and painting, while in the teaching area children developed reading and writing skills. During the event, each workshop took approximately 15 minutes. Children got around all the points and collected stamps to their passports for the completed workshops.

After participating in all the points, the children came together to perform a common task. As a common task, the children play logs, where they had to guess the name of the day's event. At the end of the task, the participated children received a surprise gift. After the program, all the families gather in the lobby on second floor, where Onni Orava was already waiting for them. Families take photos with Onni Orava and shared their experiences with Onni. The event ended after the photography. During the event was served juice and cookies for the participants in the opposite room from the play area.

Event marketing was mostly done through hotels web pages. The event was advertised on the hotel's Instagram account and through the hotel reception lobby. Also, the day before the event an advertisement had been distributed to hotel rooms for families with children. This advertisement can be found from (Appendix 2)

In the program was utilized toys and accessories from the playroom. In addition, the writer brought some Legos, modeling wax, coloring pads, paints, coloring pictures and children's books from home. During the event, easy and precise instructions for the workshops and tasks were attached to the walls. During the event photographer was taking pictures of children and Onni Orava. These pictures were delivered to the customers after the event through email. In the

case of emergency was decided to act in accordance with the hotel's instructions. The event included first aid supplies such as, patches and disinfectant.

5 RESEARCH METHODS

5.1 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research collects non-numerical data and the study aims to illustrate the significance of the data obtained. The qualitative research method examines target groups or places in order to understand social life. In general, qualitative research is seen as the opposite of quantitative research. In contrast, quantitative research uses numerical data to identify major trends. In addition, the qualitative study includes statistical measures to determine causal and correlative relationships between variables (Crossman, 2020.)

From a sociological perspective, qualitative research focuses on the micro-level of interaction, meaning everyday social interaction that emerges in life. As example of this could be customer service and its quality and its measurement such as overall customer satisfaction, day-to-day transactions and their functionality. Methods of qualitative research include interviews, observation, immersion, open-ended surveys, content analysis of textual and visual materials, focus groups and oral history (Crossman, 2020.)

In this thesis qualitative research and mix-method approach was used. The research included survey and product testing in form of the Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event. Questioner validity was proved to be reliable because return rate of the customer survey was (34) 94% and it seems that respondents had understood all of the questions. In addition, customer survey results did not reveal any contradictions.

5.2 Case study

One of the most common definitions of case study comes from the work of Merriam (2009). According to Merriam-Webster (2020b.) An intensive analysis of an individual unit such as a person or community, stressing developmental

factors in relation to the environment. This thesis includes case study method, because case under research is a single hotel from the chain, which purpose was to study the development of the support and additional services at that hotel and to improve the customer experience by bringing more value.

Case study is a useful method when the area of the research is relatively less known (Ghauri 2004, 109). According to Yin (2003, 41) is frequently quoted for his view concerning the uses of the case study approach. He argues that case studies are a preferred approach when „how“ or „why“ questions are to be answered and when the researcher has little control over the events and when the focus is on a current phenomenon in a real-life context.

Case studies are useful when it is important to understand how the organizational and environmental contexts are having an impact on or influencing social process, and when these processes may only be fully understandable in the context of the particular organization. The main aim of case studies is not to produce knowledge that could be generalized or other contexts in the conventional meaning but to explore and understand how the chosen case works as a configurative and ideographic unit. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 121; Hartley 2004, 325.)

Case studies can include multiple data collection sources. These sources can be personal interviews, verbal reports, observation and written reports (Ghauri 2004, 109-110; Hartley 2004, 323-325). In this research was used theoretical sources such as academic journal articles, books and statistical data.

The research is a single-case study focusing on the one case company. The thesis focuses on studying a single case: Development of Hotel Services for Family Travellers to Improve Customer Experience, case Original Sokos Hotel Arina. The single case approach was selected because the case reflects the product development into the practice for the case company as product testing. The single case research also enables understanding of the hotel support and additional service within the context of the case company.

5.3 Survey

The commissioner wishes and the respondent's point of view were considered in design of the survey. The purpose of the questions was to find out detailed information that would be useful to the company, considering the questions so that the customer could easily answer them (Pew Research Center 2020.)

According to the Pew Research Center (2020) structured questions provide more accurate answers and therefore are easier to process and analyse. In addition, customers are more likely to answer structured questions than open-ended questions, which may affect the outcome of the study. A disadvantage of formal questions is the increased risk that the questions will not fit well enough with the reality of the respondents. (Pew Research Center 2020; Hyysalo 2009, 129.)

Several customer satisfaction survey forms provide as little guidance as possible on how to respond and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are used to find out a broad picture of customer attitudes and opinions, as it is argued that multiple-choice questions do not provide a sufficiently broad picture of customer attitudes and opinions. (Vilkkä 2007, 68–69.)

The purpose of the questions in the form was to accurately describe the hotel's customer base, the quality of the support services and possible development ideas for the additional services, but at the same time allow the customers to clarify their own opinions on a general level. The types of questions that were used in the survey were multiple-choice and scale questions, postal questions, and open-ended questions. Most of the questions were multiple-choice questions, as from the respondents' point of view, answering structured questions is easier. The scale questions used the Likert scale, where number 1 represents the negative extreme and number 10 represents the positive extreme. In these questions, the middle number 5 represents a neutral position. Most of the scale questions ask for an opinion on the level of customer satisfaction related to the question asked, but the scale questions have also used a variation where the extremes represent two different things. This is a question of position. (Pew Research Center 2020.)

The questions in the survey form cover five different topics: customer persona, customer service, hotel facilities, and product testing. The questions measure customer satisfaction in different topics, such as quality and availability.

The questions are divided into thematic areas on the basis that they are in a logical order. According Ronkainen et al (2008) it is logical to place the easiest questions at the beginning of the form and demand the questions at the end, such as open-ended questions or free-feedback questions. Demanding questions often result in an interruption of the response, which significantly reduces the response rate when there are demanding questions right at the beginning of the form. (Ronkainen, Karjalainen & Mertala 2008, 37.)

5.4 Product testing

Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event was organized as a product test at the hotel. The event was created and organized using service design and its methods. The event included an event body and schedule, but like service design, the event was implemented using customer-oriented manner, considered the wishes and schedules of the family travellers. During the event customers atmosphere, the course and smoothness of the event, the understanding of the instructions and the interaction situations with Onni Orava were analysed. The Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event proved to be unbearable based on product testing, as the number of participants at the event was small and therefor did not bring enough added value to the customer experience at the hotel. This can be seen in the Figure 5.

Product testing did not prove to be beneficial in terms of customer experience, because average grade of the customer experience and other hotel services were ranged almost the same. Based on this, can be concluded that the product testing did not create the expected increase in customer value.

6 RESEARCH RESULTS

6.1 Survey results

The customer survey was distributed at the hotel breakfast on 29 February and 7 March as paper forms on ski holidays in February and March 2020. In addition, the survey was distributed to families participating in the Onni Orava Puuhakoulu events 28 February and 6 March. The survey was decided to distribute for family travellers as paper survey to ensure that hotel customers had a personalized service. Total completed and full field answers were returned 34. In total, 36 questionnaires were distributed, giving a return rate of 94%. However, according to the information provided by the Original Sokos Hotel Arina, there was 32 children on the first Saturday and 44 in the second week, resulting in a total of 76 children. According to the answers of the survey, there were many types of families, but the average of children in the family was 1.56. From this information it follows that there were about 49 families. According to previous information validity rate of the survey was 70%, which makes the study reliable. Each respondent had succeeded in answering most of the questions, as the survey had open-ended questions as well as ready-made answers. Respondents have understood all the questions asked in the customer survey quite well, as the results did not reveal any contradictions.

The customer survey background information asks the number of family members of the respondents, the age of the children, the length of stay, the purpose of the accommodation and the respondent's opinion of the additional services. All the respondents had agreed to indicate the number of family members, the age of their children, the length of stay and the purpose of the trip. As in theory was mentioned most of Finnish families consist of 3 persons, but average children number in families are 1,85. The study concludes that the number of children and the average size of families staying at the hotel correspond to the information given in the theory. The number of family members was surprisingly even, 10 (29.4%) of the responding families were families of 4 persons and (29.4%) were families of 3 persons. This can be seen in (Figure 2). According to theory most of Finnish families consist of 3 persons, but average children number in families are 1,85. In addition, study showed that there were

7 families with 2 persons (20.6%) and other families with more persons or traveling in groups were (20.6%). According to the information received, most of the other families staying at the hotel were traveling for dance competition. The survey reveals that most of the families who responded to the survey travelled for leisure. Some families also intend to visit relatives during their stay.

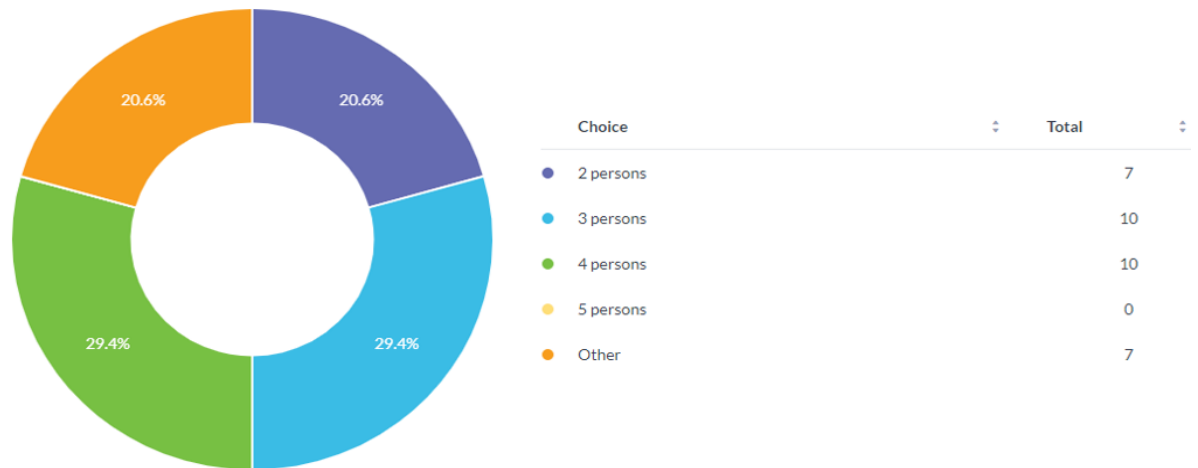


Figure 2 Number of family members (n=34)

According to the questionnaire responses, most families have one child 19 (56%). The second largest group consists of families with two children, 11 (32%). There were other families with three children (12%). The average age of children was 6.5 years. When divided into groups of 0-5 years, 6-10 years, and 11-18 years, the results showed the following. However, most of children that overnight at the hotel were under five years old 31 (58.4%).

Most of the families staying, 19 (55.8%) reported staying at the hotel for only one night and that Oulu was not their actual destination. The second largest group, 8 (23.5%), reported staying overnight at their hotel and their actual destination was Oulu. The remaining 6 families (17.6%) reported staying at the hotel for a couple of nights and staying in Oulu. One of the respondents reported staying in a hotel for a couple of nights, but Oulu was not his actual destination. In addition, one family reported staying at the hotel for three nights.

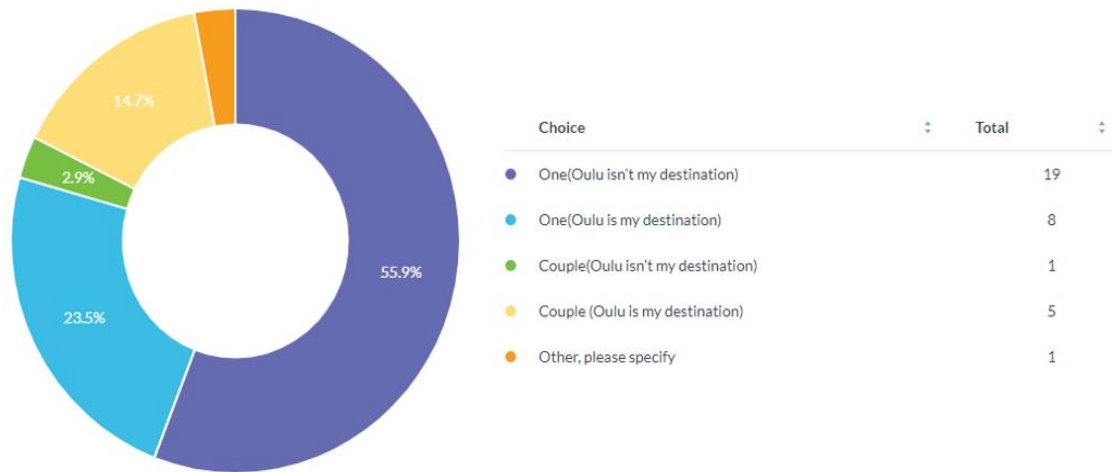


Figure 3 Length of stay of guests at the hotel (n=34)

The survey also revealed the utilization rate of existing services and families' awareness of children services at the hotel. The replies revealed that the meeting services were not used at all during the ski holiday, because most of the families had their holiday during the ski holiday. Only one respondent said he would combine work and leisure during his stay. Among the most popular additional services during the stay were restaurant services and children services. A large proportion of respondents reported using restaurant services 16 (34.8%) and child services (30.4%) during their stay. Six families, (13%) of the respondents, reported using sauna services. In addition, the survey also revealed that a surprising number of families did not use the additional services of the hotel during their stay. There were 10 such families (21.7%). Possibly, this occupancy rate may have been influenced by the low awareness of families about child services at the hotel, as the results indicate that 10 (22.7%) of the families feel that they are not aware of the hotel's children's services. In theory and practise missing points in marketing as advertisement and lacking information on the webpages may negatively affect the whole customer experience. According to the survey results, the most well-known children's services at the hotel are the children's playroom and the fairy-tale corner 21 (47.7%). The second most well-known children's service is Onni Orava breakfast 7 (15.9%). The most recent ones will be the opportunity to borrow children equipment 4 (9.1%) and the Onni Orava Environmental Passport and City Spot 2 (4.5%). The results show that family's awareness of hotel services for children is surprisingly low and should be improved by marketing more services at the reception.

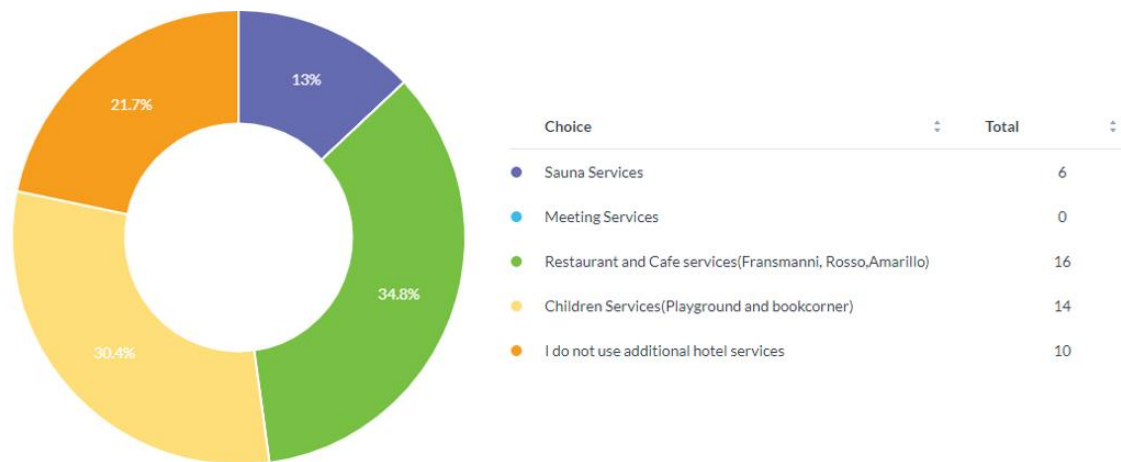


Figure 4 Customer service use in addition to accommodation(n=34)

Sauna services received the highest score for the quality of additional services (8.57), although the utilization rate of sauna services was not very high. In addition, the questionnaire showed suggestions for sauna services such as make women's shifts later and build different saunas for women and men. Other services as the restaurant and child services came in with an average score of 8. Some respondents felt that the restaurant services did not take enough children into consideration. The suggestions for the restaurant was to build a playground for children at the restaurant and purchase toys there. The responses to the questionnaire indicate that the children's own menu at the restaurant brings value for the restaurant.

The children's service at the hotel was rated 8, which shows that there are many things that needs improvement. Families who responded to the survey felt that children's playgrounds should be improved by modernizing playgrounds and diversifying their children's toys. The play area at the breakfast is quite poor, as customers find it too small and too few toys. Better fencing has also been desired in the children's play area at breakfast. In addition, the play area is located at the end of the room, which makes it very difficult for families with children to move around for breakfast. Families need more diverse activities in children's play areas. The responses to the questionnaire also indicate that there is poor information on activities for children and child services. However, the reception is well attended to by the children, with a surprise gift and friendly service. In any

case, the families were generally quite satisfied with the children service at the hotel.

A scale of 1-10 has been used to evaluate the survey. According to the survey, families with children are generally satisfied with the hotel rooms (8.57), but there is still need for improvement. Some customers think that hotel rooms are small when traveling with a group and that the room cleanliness could be better. In addition, the feedback indicates that the rooms should be modernized and ventilated better. The hotel premises were rated (8.03) including a hotel lobby, a sauna and a fitness room. In general, the feedback suggested that the hotel fitness room could be bigger.

The survey showed that most families are not aware of the hotel free services, which also effects on their utilization rate. According to Figure 5, this kind of services are for example, free children services, such as the Terva Tonttu Toivo and Onni Orava environmental passport and city spotting. These services should market more to increase awareness of hotel services and increase utilization rates.

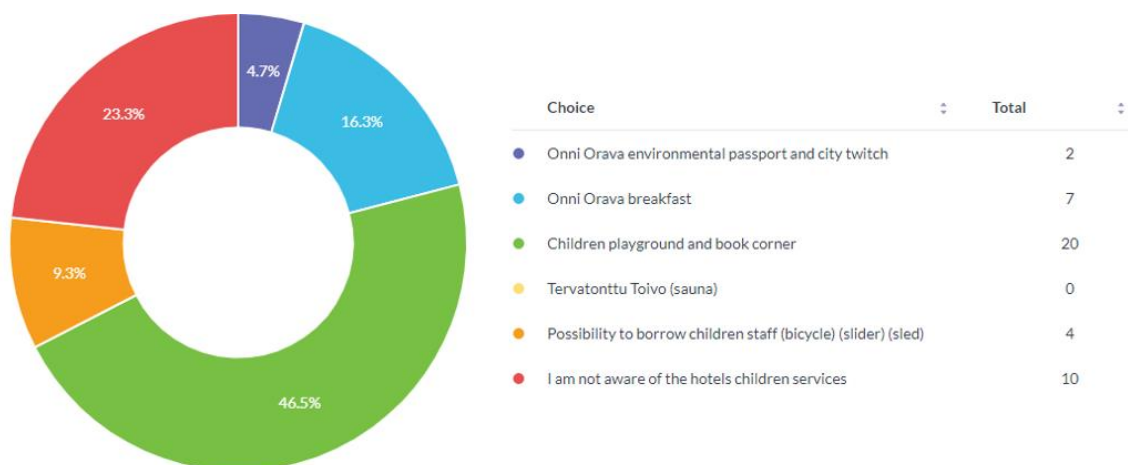


Figure 5 Customers awareness of the hotel children services (n=34)

The hotel breakfast causes different feelings in families with children. The overall average rating for hotel breakfast was (8.57). Generally, families were happy with the breakfast, but there was also a lot of negative feedback. Feedback was probably influenced by the rush of skiing holidays and the multitude of customers. The survey showed that families were not satisfied with the cleanliness of the

breakfast tables and the lack of space due to the congestion. The congestion also contributed to the fast running out of food, and some of the food started to cool down on the breakfast table. Some families also needed trays for breakfast. In addition, there was a lot of feedback about the children's playground at the breakfast room.

Most families with children were really satisfied with their stay at this hotel, as the average customer experience of the whole service was (8.74). This figure has been influenced by the customer service of the hotel staff as there has been a lot of positive feedback from the reception. The hotel is doing well based on the feedback from the survey respondents, but small improvements should still be made. The hotel should pay more attention to marketing its free services, the cleanliness of its hotel rooms and its breakfast facilities. In addition, the refurbishment of the hotel rooms seems to be timely. According to theory with all these small changes customers, customer experience should improve, because customer experience is consisting of many different details.

6.2 Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event results

Most families with children who responded to the survey did not attend the Onni Orava Puuhakoulu event during they stay at the hotel. A total number of participants in the event was four families, but only three responded to the survey. As you can see in Figure 5, there were a total of 3 participants (8.6%) of all respondents to the survey. Based on the results, the event had gone well on both days. The average score for the event was 8.67, which shows that all the planning and implementation of the event has been successful. The results also showed that the participants were satisfied with all aspects of the event, such as photography, serving and making the event itself. Based on the responses, the families had no expectations of the event.

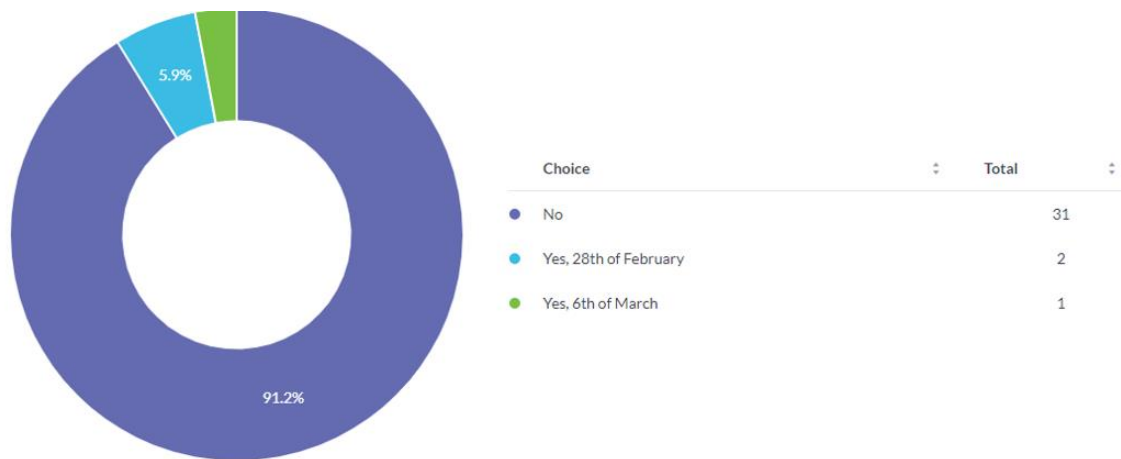


Figure 6 Onni Orava Puuhakoulu: Number of participants at the event(n=34)

The survey showed a lack of marketing of the event, as most families heard about the event at the reception just before the event. The event was advertised on the hotel's Instagram account and through the hotel reception lobby. In addition, an advertisement for the event had been distributed to hotel rooms for families with children the day before. Based on the results, the above measures were not enough to market the event. According to theory the customer experience consists of encounters, images and emotions created to customer by the company. In this case, the lack of marketing may have had a negative effect on the customer's image of the event and particularly of the company's operations. The first event was more successful from a marketing perspective. The event is not comprehensive, as it requires over-organization of arrangements from the hotel. Of course, the highlight of the event was Onni Orava and a surprise gift. Before mentioned result was to be expected, as the theory also mentioned that gifts can bring little value to the customer experience and surprise the customer positively. In the future, Onni Orava will also be the main asset of the hotel for entertaining families with children. Onni Orava mascot does not require the organization of an event or other attributes.

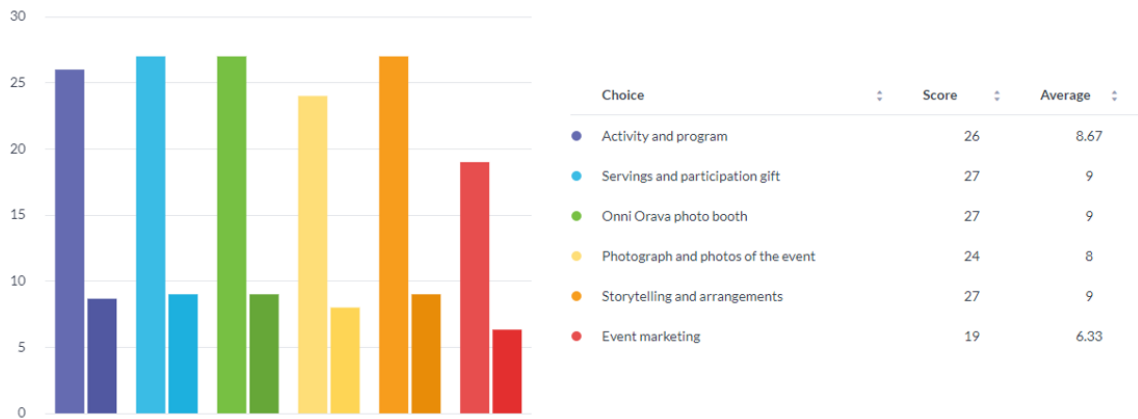


Figure 7 Onni Orava Puuhakoulu: Event evaluation(n=3)

During the events, customer behaviour and general atmosphere were also observed. The first event had more participants than the second event. It was noteworthy, though, that during the second event there was much more customers staying at the hotel, but there was little interest in the event. Perhaps the hotel customers may have also influenced on this situation, as during the second event, most of guests were from the North. The atmosphere at the hotel and at both events was positive. However, during the second event, there was some hurry, which was reflected in the hotel breakfast as a rush hour. During the second event, a few families with children went to see hotel mascot Onni Orava, but eventually concluded that they had no time to wait for Onni.

The children attending the event were very pleased with the school workshops, and there was enough to do for each child. The schedule of the event program was shortened slightly, reducing the duration of the workshops to one hour, which after Onni Orava arrived. The older children performed faster than expected, but it did not affect their mood. After all, the event was very simple and small. Families with children were happy, as they got something to do with the children as soon as they arrived at the hotel.

However, according the results of the survey product testing was proved to be unbearable based on product testing, as the number of participants at the event was small and therefor did not bring enough added value to the customer experience at the hotel. This can be seen in Figure 6. According to survey

average grade for customer experience was (9) which is almost the same as than among all respondents (8,74).

6.3 Development suggestions

Now, the situation at Original Sokos Hotel Arina seems to be positive. The hotel customers like families with children are very satisfied with the customer service and overall customer experience at the hotel. Changes are coming to the hotel rooms this year, as the hotel rooms are being redesigned and the hotel rooms are getting a new theme. This change will be very current as feedback from the survey has shown that hotel rooms would need a refurbishment and possibly even an extension. According to the feedback received, the hotel should pay more attention to the cleanliness of the rooms. Some hotel guests felt that the rooms were unclean and smelled like a drain. The hotel could solve this problem by passing feedback to the hotel floor care, which could give the floor care staff more attention to cleanliness and room ventilation.

In order to avoid congestion and lack of seats at the hotel breakfast, the hotel should ensure for a sufficient number of staff, as the seating places runs out quickly when employees do not have enough time to clean their tables in time. Workers should take care of enough food amount for breakfast and that the food served should be served warm to the buffet. In addition, customers had wished for a variety on breakfast dishes. Possibly, the hotel breakfast could take advantage of different seasonal products at different times of the year for a more diversified selection. An example would be four different menus to be served depending on the season. The menus should consider different seasonal products and easy breakfast recipes. At Christmas, for example, instead of a normal oatmeal, rice porridge could be offered etc. In addition, the hotel could provide trays and children's cutlery at the breakfast, which would greatly facilitate families with children at breakfast. There has been some negative feedback from the breakfast playground. The playground should be moved, or other improvements should be made. Additional toys could be brought from the children's playroom to the breakfast play area. The play area at breakfast could possibly be expanded and helped to allow children to play there while dining. Possibly a children's TV from the hotel's fairy-tale corner could be moved to the

hotel breakfast play area as it does not appear to be heavily used in its current location.

The public areas of the hotel are clean, but possibly a highchair could be arranged on the second-floor lobby, so children can also dine near the play area if needed. The hotel playground had been left with both good and bad feedback. Some guests found the hotel playground to be outdated. New toys and a fresh look for the playroom were needed. The solution to this problem could be to rearrange the playground and obtain new toys such as various board games, colouring books, jump rope, etc. Many parts of the current Kimble game have been lost, so a new game or replacement is needed. In addition, board games like Afrikan tähti, Monopoly and different memory games could be purchased in the playground. The children really enjoyed painting the Onni Orava drawings during the event, so the drawings could be brought to the children's playroom. As an additional alternative to colouring the pictures, hotel could buy different colouring books. The playground also has a wall-climbing track and a gym ball for sports. Hotel could also buy a jump rope to the playground. Small extra games could also be developed in the room such as donkey tail and bingo.

The feedback also revealed that the hotel had little information. Customers felt ignorant about the hotel's children services. Free children services such as Onni Orava environmental passport and city spotting, the borrowing possibility for baby equipment and Onni Orava breakfasts were not very familiar to guests. Customers has never heard of Terva tonttu Toivo, even though the elf has his own book in the fairytale corner of the hotel. The hotel should deliver the information to the reception, so the services could be promoted, and customers would be aware of those opportunities. The book of Terva tonttu Toivo could be moved to a children's playroom.

Customers' wishes included that free parking would be desirable. In addition, many customers felt that Onni Orava at the breakfast added value to the customer experience at the hotel. Such surprises could be arranged at the hotel more often. The hotel could cooperate even more with other companies and offer a wide range of activities for families with children in Oulu. For example, hotel could collaborate with a climbing center, movie theaters, and adventure parks. In

addition, the Eden spa, which is part of the hotel chain, could be promoted even more.

The hotel has an extra bed option that could be developed in the future. Today, there are various crib variations from travel cots to standard cribs that are available in different hotels. In the future, possibly, comfort could be improved by providing children with cots for overnight stays. The hotel also accommodates pets that support the hotel 's image in the eyes of customers and makes hotel unique compared to the other competitors. This pet overstay service could be further developed, because as in theory was mentioned before companies should focus to fulfil needs of specific target markets instead of pleasing all potential customers.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to study customer experience in hotel support and additional services and to develop hotel services in the best possible way. The aim was also to find customer persona of the families staying at the hotel and their needs. In this thesis was used qualitative research method, conducting a paper survey and product testing. All data was collected during ski holiday weeks (9–10). The target group of the study was the family customers with children staying at the hotel. Commissioner for thesis was Original Sokos Hotel Arina, Oulu.

These children events were organized as product test in order to reach understanding whether there is a need for similar events or products in the hotel in the future. The organization of children events was also intended to guarantee a sufficient amount of feedback for the study.

The start of the thesis was delayed until the beginning of January 2020, which caused some problems, as the schedule of the thesis was limited. The purpose of the thesis was to organize children events already at the end of February. This limited schedule had affected on thesis in general.

For thesis data was collected by survey and feedback during breakfast in the hotel while ski holidays. This questionnaire was done by paper version in Finnish language, because most of the families expected to be Finns. For advertisement during questioner small candies and gifts were distributed to the respondents. Onni Orava participated in the distribution questionnaire.

In addition, Onni Orava proved to be most important part of the program during children events. Although customers enjoyed the program, event did not prove to be profitable for the hotel, because number of participants was low.

Today hotel situation seems to be positive. The hotel customers are satisfied with the overall customer experience and customer services at the hotel. This year hotel rooms will be renovated, and hotel rooms will be got new themes. These room changes are current because according to theory and feedback customers were waiting for it. However, hotel still should pay more attention to marketing

and advertising own products and activities, because from the feedback came out that most of the families did not know or used hotels children services.

Original Sokos Hotel Arina is collaborating with other companies but there would be a need for new product packages. Families are waiting to get more variables activities and value for their money as example hotel packages should include accommodation and tickets to some activity (Hop Lop) for reasonable price. The product packages would give hotel customers more value when looking on the customers experience in overall.

As in theory was mentioned regular and often annual customer satisfaction surveys are the most familiar ways to measure customer experience and satisfaction. The collected customer satisfaction feedback should be both positive and passive. All of the feedback should be analysed and implemented in further actions.

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APPENDICIES

Appendix 1. Survey

Appendix 2. Product card

Appendix 1 1(5);



Tervetuloa! Nimeni on Elizaveta Suomela ja olen Lapin Ammattikorkeakoulun viimeisen vuoden opiskelija. Tämä kysely on luotu opinnäytetyötutkimustani varten. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on tutkia kuinka kehittää hotellipalveluita perhematkailijoille asiakaskokemuksen parantamiseksi Oulussa. Kysely toteutetaan yhteistyössä Original Sokos Hotel Arinan kanssa. Kysely on anonyymi ja se vie noin viisi minuuttia aikaanne. Kyselystä saatuja vastauksia ja palautetta käytetään opinnäytetyötutkimuksessa ja Original Sokos Hotel Arinan palveluiden kehittämisessä.

1. Montako perheenjäsentä matkustaa kanssasi? Merkitse aikuisten ja lasten yhteinen lukumäärä.

☐ 2 henkilöä ☐ 3 henkilöä ☐ 4 henkilöä ☐ 5 henkilöä ☐
Muu? _____

2. Montako lasta matkustaa kanssasi ja kuinka vanhoja he ovat?

3. Mikä on matkasi tarkoitus?

☐ Liikematkailu (työ tai opiskelu) ☐ Vapaa-ajanvietto ☐ Vierailu sukulaisilla ☐
Muu? _____

4. Kuinka monta yötä viivyt Original Sokos Hotel Arinassa?

☐ Yhden yön (Oulu ei ole varsinainen matkakohteeni)
☐ Yhden yön (Oulu on varsinainen matkakohteeni)
☐ Pari yötä (Oulu ei ole varsinainen matkakohteeni)
☐ Pari yötä (Oulu on varsinainen matkakohteeni)



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Appendix 1 2(5);



5. Käytätkö Original Sokos Hotel Arinan palveluita majoituksen lisäksi?

- ☐ Saunapalvelut
- ☐ Kokouspalvelut
- ☐ Ravintolapalvelu (Fransmanni)(Rosso)(Amarillo)
- ☐ Lastenpalvelut (Leikkihuone)(Satunurkka)
- ☐ En käytä hotellin lisäpalveluita

6. Oletko tietoinen Original Sokos Hotel Arinan seuraavista lasten palveluista?

- ☐ Onni Oravan ympäristöpassi ja kaupunkibongaus
- ☐ Onni Oravan aamupala
- ☐ Lasten leikkihuone ja satunurkkaus
- ☐ Tervatonttu Toivo (sauna)
- ☐ Lastentarvikkeiden lainaus mahdollisuus (polkupyörä)(liukuri)(pulkka)
- ☐ En ole tietoinen hotellin lastenpalveluista

7. Kuinka tyytyväinen olet Original Sokos Hotel Arinan lisäpalveluiden laatuun? Arvioi palveluiden laatu 1(todella tyytymätön) 5 (en osaa sanoa) 10 (todella tyytyväinen)

Saunapalvelut	_____
Kokouspalvelut	_____
Ravintolapalvelut	_____
Lastenpalvelut	_____

8. Otetaanko lapset riittävän hyvin huomioon Original Sokos Hotel Arinan lisäpalveluissa?



ARINA

ORIGINAL BY SOKOS HOTELS

Appendix 1 3(5);



9. Kuinka hyvin hotellin tuotteet ja palvelut vastaavat teidän perheenne tarpeisiin? 1 (todella tyytymätön) 5 (en osaa sanoa) 10 (todella tyytyväinen)

Hotellihuoneet

Hotellin yleiset tilat

(Sauna, aula ja kuntoluone)

Hotellin ilmaispalvelut

(Ympäristöpassi ja lainauspalvelu)

Hotellin aamupala

10. Mihin Original Sokos Hotel Arinan palveluihin tai tuotteisiin kaipaisit parannusta ja miksi?



ARINA

ORIGINAL BY SOKOS HOTELS

Appendix 1 4(5);



11. Arvio yleisesti asiakaskokemuksesi Original Sokos Hotel Arinassa 1 (todella tyytymätön) 5 (en osaa sanoa) 10 (todella tyytyväinen)

12. Osallistuitko 28.2 tai 3.6 Hotellissa järjestettävään lastentapahtumaan? (Onni Oravan Puuhakoulu)

☐ En osallistunut ☐ Osallistuin 28.2 ☐ Osallistuin 6.3

13. Minkälaisia odotuksia ja kokemuksia teidän perheellänne oli Onni Oravan Puuhakoulu-Tapahtumasta?

14. Oliko tapahtuma mielestänne mieluinen? Arvio seuraavia asioita Onni Oravan Puuhakoulu-Tapahtumasta asteikolla 1 (todella tyytymätön) 5 (en osaa sanoa) 10 (todella tyytyväinen)



ARINA

ORIGINAL BY SOKOS HOTELS

Appendix 1 5(5);



Aktiviteetit ja ohjelma	_____
Tarjoilu ja osallistumislahja	_____
Onni Oravan kuvaustuokio	_____
Valokuvaus ja kuvat	_____
Tarinointi ja järjestelyt	_____
Tapahtuma markkinointi	_____
Yleisesti tapahtuma kokonaisuutena	_____

**Elizaveta Suomela ja Original Sokos Hotel Arina kiittää
osallistumisestanne!**

Appendix 2 1(1);



ONNI ORAVAN PUUHAKOULU 28.2 ja 6.3 17:00-19:00

Tervetuloa!

Original Sokos Hotel Arinan 2 kerroksessa sijaitsevaan leikkihuoneeseen. Tapahtuma on suunnattu 3-8 vuotiaille lapsille ja heidän vanhemmilleen. Huomioithan, että tilaa on rajallisesti. Paikalla on kolme opiskelijaa, mutta lapset ovat vanhempien vastuulla.

Mukana myös Onni Orava. Lapset pääsevät tutustelemaan eri ammatteihin puuhapajojen muodossa. Tapahtuman lopussa jaetaan yllätyslahjat.

Tarjolla myös mehua ja keksejä!

Tapahtuman järjestäjänä toimii Lapin Ammattikorkeakoulun opiskelija Elizaveta Suomela ja tapahtuma järjestetään opinnäytetyötutkimusta varten.